

Is Penkovsky Really Dead? Some In Moscow Not Sure

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Moscow, May 17—Is Oleg Penkovsky really dead? For that matter, was he ever alive—in the role so fully described in court before he was ordered to die for spying?

Soviet authorities say he was executed by a firing squad yesterday, just five days after being sentenced. There is no firm reason to doubt their word.

Foreigners Not Satisfied

But the foreign colony in Moscow is not so easily satisfied in a matter that spread so widely among its members.

Every American and Briton here was a friend or acquaintance of at least one of the ten diplomats and two wives declared persona non grata for their alleged contacts with Penkovsky and his purported courier, Greville Wynne, British business man.

Thus there is continuing gossip. At its most elementary level, children want to know why their playmates had to rush



OLEG PENKOVSKY
Man, myth or corpse?

away from Moscow so suddenly.

Ladies say, "Why that nice Tolstoy's work too simple and man; he was so funny; he couldn't have been a spy—could he?"

And there are even more skept-

ical and imaginative souls among them. The most doubtful of all say "The entire tale was a fake, a put-up job to make the West look bad and warn the Russians to be alert for spies in their midst."

Other Ideas

Others offer the idea that Penkovsky was a double agent, working for both sides and others the suggestion that he was a provocateur who volunteered his services to the West in order to penetrate the American and British intelligence operation here as deeply as possible — and succeeded.

If the whole trial was indeed a fabrication, it was an exceedingly thorough one. The testimony of the Russian and English defendants differed at points over the degree of blame to be placed on the other, but they consistently agreed on tiny details of where, when and whom they met in a period of a year and a half.

Even master plotters and sub-plotters, men who might consider Tolstoy's work too simple and obvious, would have a hard time working out so much coincidence in fiction.

This theory does not stand up under concentrated examination.

Permission To Travel

If the graying 44-year-old deputy chief of the foreign section of the State Committee for Scientific Research and Coordination was a double agent, he obviously did not bring home enough information from his foreign sources here and abroad to make it worthwhile for his Soviet employers to retain him despite his duplicity.

But his job was a natural for such an effort. He worked in an organization responsible for receiving scientific data and funneling it into the proper hands. He had the specific assignment of contacting foreign business men and arranging exhibits and purchases of advanced technical materials.

Volunteered Services

In this slot he had virtually unlimited permission to travel abroad — a privilege very rare for even official Soviet citizens.

From this position, with the intelligence background of a tour as assistant military attache in Ankara seven years ago, Penkovsky persistently volunteered his services to the West.

Once he handed a written proposal that he become a spy to the House Club, a popular movie and bar for Westerners here. He

asked that they pass it on to anyone at the American Embassy.

Policemen are always on duty at the door to this club. Why was this particular Russian not afraid to make such a contact at such a place?

Anyhow, the Americans investigated him and purportedly told him later that they thought his offer was an intentional provocation.

But the British accepted it when it was transmitted by Wynne, and Penkovsky allegedly tied in with a dozen Western intelligence operatives here and others of apparently high rank in Paris and London.

Those who push the theory that he was a planted KGB agent who thus uncovered a broad Western network in Moscow explained that the 5,000 photos and other data he passed westward were either phony or of minimal value.

They admit they will only be proven correct when a balding man with dyed hair and a newly cultivated mustache "surfaces" a couple of years hence as a Soviet official in some other sensitive spot where a smattering of English and a yen for nightlife would be useful.

He will answer to the name of Penkovsky or Young—which was Penkovsky's undercover nickname—or perhaps he called Molodetsky, which means "bright boy" and originated with the Russian word for young.

Unlikely?

Of course.

But it makes good gossip.